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Abraham Lincoln

An Appreciation

By One Who Knew Him

BENJAMIN RUSH COWEN

BREVET BRIGADIER GENERAL

Paymaster U. S. Army 1861-4;
Adjutant General of Ohio
1864-8; Assistant Secretary
of the Interior
1871-6.



CINCINNATI

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By BENJAMIN SPRAGUE COWEN

Preface

BENJAMIN RUSH COWEN was born at Moorfield, Ohio, August 15, 1831, and died at Cincinnati, January 29, 1908. During his long life he served his country as a legislative officer, as Adjutant-General of Ohio during the trying Civil War period, as Assistant Secretary of the Interior under President Grant and as Clerk of the Federal Courts for Southern Ohio; at intervals engaging in general business, in banking and in editorial and literary labors.

With a classical education and practical training, and a natural aptitude as a writer he ranked with the strongest editors of his time, and the clearness of diction and underlying sound sense in what he wrote gave particular value to his various papers on the

historical characters and incidents with which he had been connected. He refused to allow these papers to be printed until after his death, giving them to one of his sons some months before that sad event with the brief remark:

“After I am gone I want you to make such disposition of these as you see fit.”

In accordance with that injunction, the Address on Lincoln is now given publicity, the Centenary of the First American making it inadvisable to hold it until arrangements can be perfected for the publication of his other manuscripts.

B. S. COWEN.

Cincinnati, January 29, 1909.

Abraham Lincoln

AN instructed Democracy in which there is absolute freedom of initiative, of privilege and of opportunity is never at a loss for heroes of its own to applaud and emulate and honor. The history of this Nation is luminous with the names of those who, in war and peace, in public and in private life, in field, in forum and in factory, have borne its banners to victory in every step of its wonderful progress.

Most prominent of the long line of those whom we delight to honor, and one who stands out as a great personal and historical promontory, marking the most important era in that progress, is that homely sage and hero of the backwoods, who, crownless and unheralded, came from his retirement and in a few direct but pregnant sentences; a silence that was golden and a speech that was silvern; by masterly

action and masterly inaction, won the confidence of the people as he moved unscathed through the thrice heated furnace of Civil War.

It is a trite saying that "circumstances make the man", but if they made Abraham Lincoln, it was circumstances that influenced him before he was known to the world. It was the privation and the self-denial of his fifty formative years which molded and fixed his character so firmly and so well, that he was able, in the fulness of time, to impress that character on his surroundings in the last four years of his life to a greater extent than any of his predecessors had done, or than any of us were able to realize until his work was completed.

With none of the factitious advantages which his predecessors had enjoyed, but with every conceivable drawback and embarrassment, as the world judges such things, Lincoln seemed to vault, as it were, at a single bound into the front rank of statesmen and rulers. For such an hour he proved the man of destiny.

Men marvelled at this and resented it, for a time,

as a violation of all the traditions. They wondered whence he had his wisdom, his rare poise of character, his accurate judgment, his consummate leadership, his mastery of words, and it is only since his death that the story of his training and development has revealed the secret. His whole life, as we now know it, seemed a preparation for the great emergency of liberty, and afforded that training of adversity which tempers men for any hazard.

Reared amid surroundings so humble and obscure that they would seem sufficient to crush out all manly ambition, or possibility of advancement; until long after his majority subject to the most grinding poverty; in a community where wealth and creature comforts as we know them were unknown—the poorest; awkward, uncouth, and ungainly in person to the extent of inviting ridicule even after he became President; without any of the arts and blandishments deemed essential to popular acclaim or political preferment; uneducated so far as schools educate; without intellectual ancestry or pride of birth, he burst upon the country at the most critical period in our history, mature in

years, ripe in judgment and of such rare mental endowment and such inherent and genuine manhood as drew the most distinguished and cultured men of the country to his support.

What was the secret of his development ?

More than any other man, Mr. Lincoln illustrated the operation of those peculiar forces which gave to the West such masterful influence in public affairs. He was of the West western; he lived his life on the frontier; its growth was his growth; its life his life, and yet when he came from his obscurity and entered into the great national arena he understood the older East far better than the East understood him or his people. In fact he seemed at times to understand the East better than the East understood itself.

The West of Mr. Lincoln's lifetime was intensely political and it felt, in a peculiar sense, the pulse of the Nation's life throbbing in the great artery of emigration that stretched athwart the continent. In no sense was it separate from the East, because it was constantly receiving fresh members from thence and with all such accessions came the fresh influence

of suggestion and the impulse of assimilation. These forces he utilized to the full, so that few men of any time excelled him in the capacity of understanding whatever he had in hand, and to study that quality in him is to study the forces which shaped the national life of that period.

While it is true that he never laid aside the appearance of the rough and brawny frontiersman, yet he never ceased to grow in all the qualities that enter into the strength and dignity of real greatness. With the shrewd and seeing eye of the woodsman, than which none is shrewder or more observant, his view readily adjusted itself to see and give due weight to greater things, under whatever aspect they were presented.

He constantly mixed with all sorts and conditions of men from every section of the country and the world, discussing the policies of the State and the Nation, so that his mind became traveled, enlightened, and trained, in spite of the apparent narrowness and sordidness of his environment.

His debate with Douglas in 1858 first brought him to the attention of the people outside of his State,

as much, perhaps, at the first, because of the prestige of his opponent as from the character of his speeches. The country accepted his talent on sight, largely because of his ability to hold his own in debate with the recognized leader of the United States Senate.

Cincinnati has an interesting, though somewhat remote connection with the Lincoln-Douglas debate, though I mention it more to illustrate Mr. Lincoln's remarkable magnanimity even before he came upon the wider arena where he won immortality.

In 1857 he was associated with Mr. Edwin M. Stanton, then a citizen of Pittsburg, and Mr. George Harding, a citizen of Philadelphia, in a celebrated patent cause involving the validity of the McCormick reaper patents. Both Stanton and Harding were recognized as great leaders in the practice of patent law. The cause was one involving millions of dollars, and came on for argument in the United States Circuit Court in this city, with Lincoln, Stanton and Harding present as counsel for McCormick.

Mr. Lincoln had prepared an elaborate brief and all the attorneys came prepared for a battle royal by

reason of the large interests at stake. Neither Stanton nor Harding had ever seen Lincoln until they met on that occasion, and had probably never heard of him as a practitioner of patent law. His appearance was not such as to recommend him to a fastidious eastern lawyer, who was always especially careful of his personal appearance. He wore a long, loose and somewhat soiled linen duster and his appearance and manners were uninviting. Both of his colleagues snubbed him, refused to consult with him or to associate with him while here, and openly derided and insulted him.

When the cause was called for argument Mr. Lincoln was at his post, notwithstanding the treatment of his colleagues, who still persistently refused to recognize him as of counsel. The several machines were on exhibition, as is usual in such cases, when Mr. Lincoln took hold of the tongue of one of them and began pushing it back and forth to exhibit its action, saying as he did so, "I guess I can do this part of the work as well as any of you." Thereupon Stanton took hold of Lincoln's coat tails and rudely jerked him aside, telling him to get out of the way.

This so mortified Mr. Lincoln that he retired from the court room, sent his brief to Stanton and left for home without taking part in the argument. Stanton returned the brief unopened.

After the trial was over Mr. McCormick sent Lincoln a check for \$3000, which the latter returned, saying he had earned nothing in the case. McCormick sent the check again, saying that he was the best judge of the value of Lincoln's services. Lincoln then retained the fee and it was with that money he was able to meet the expenses of his debate with Douglas.

Notwithstanding the humiliation and insult Mr. Lincoln could recognize talent under any circumstances, and, when he became President, four years later, he offered Mr. Harding the Commissionership of Patents, which was declined, and he appointed Mr. Stanton Secretary of War, an example of magnanimity without a parallel in the history of our politics.

In telling me the incident a year or two since, Mr. Harding said that when Lincoln sent for him to come to Washington in March, 1861, before calling at the

White House he called on Stanton, at his residence in Washington. This was some months before the latter became Secretary of War. He found Stanton on the croquet ground and as he approached him, Stanton's greeting was: "By the way, Harding, I have found out that there is a great deal more in that man Lincoln than we thought when we met him in Cincinnati."

His visit to New York soon after the Lincoln-Douglas debate, which grew out of the reputation acquired therein, and his speech in Cooper Institute in February, 1860, may be regarded as his first appearance in the National political arena. That speech was a revelation to the people of the East, who had been accustomed to look upon the great West of that day much as the Jews of old looked upon Galilee — whence no good thing could come. He stormed the citadel of their pride of culture, struck the keynote of the campaign of 1860, and at the conclusion of that speech found himself an important factor in an important era in national affairs. That speech was the most accurate and impartial epitome of the history of the slave power in this country that had ever

appeared, setting it forth with such clearness, coherence and power that it became the reliable and irrefutable textbook for future campaigns.

The closing words of his first inaugural address, to which nothing in our literature of plaintive entreaty is comparable, may be taken as a sample of his literary style at the opening of his official career:

“Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from every patriot grave to every loving heart and hearthstone all over this broad land will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as they surely will be by the better angels of our nature.”

His Gettysburg oration, really an impromptu effort, and a later production, was the envy of Edward Everett who was a recognized master of verbal expression and saw in Mr. Lincoln’s speech a nation’s classic.

The Westminster Review said that utterance of Lincoln excelled the oration of Pericles over the dead of the first year of the Peloponnesian War by as much as Nature takes precedence of Art.

It has been suggested that Mr. Lincoln might, with great propriety, be called as a witness for Shakespeare against those criticasters who deny him the authorship of the plays which bear his name, for the sole reason that they cannot imagine it possible to produce such results unaided by books and schools and colleges. If these men could show similar results through such helps they may then have one fact tending to prove that such results cannot be reached without such helps. But in the absence of proof I must accept both Lincoln and Shakespeare and confess ignorance of the methods by which they became so great.

That oration shows with striking force the power of the monosyllable in composition when deftly handled. Out of a total of two hundred and ninety-eight words in the oration, one hundred and ninety-five are words of one syllable.

Not alone in his messages and formal State papers do those beautiful and forcible examples of rhetoric appear, but in his private letters as well. Here, for example, is an extract from one of his letters, evidently

written in haste, but which must live while the memory of our Civil War endures:

“When peace with victory comes there will be some black men who will remember that with silent tongue and clenched teeth and steady eye and well poised bayonet they have helped on mankind to this great consummation. While I fear there will be some white men unable to forget that with malignant heart and deceitful speech they have striven to hinder and prevent it.”

There are many quotable phrases in his writings. I noticed at an anti-expansion meeting at the Odeon a while ago, this sentiment from Mr. Lincoln was made to do duty as a motto for the occasion: “No man is good enough to govern another without that other’s consent.” That sounds very fine as an abstract proposition, yet the little Americans who figured at that meeting forgot that Mr. Lincoln’s title to fame rests chiefly on the fact that he compelled the people of sixteen states to submit to a government they had repudiated and foresworn.

With none of the bold, impassionate eloquence of Phillips, or the ripe thought of Evarts, or the ornate

rhetoric of Ingersoll, Lincoln was the superior of them all in clear, logical statement of issues and of the principles by which those issues were defended and maintained. Another great secret of his power was the possession of that deep, great, genuine sincerity which Carlyle said was the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic.

Careful study of his speeches reveals an unusual charm of statement, an unanswerable style of reasoning, forcible illustrations in which romance and logic, fun and pathos were singularly combined.

I first heard the name of Abraham Lincoln used in a public meeting at the Philadelphia National Republican Convention in 1856, which was two years before his debate with Douglas. An enthusiastic Illinois delegate incidentally referred to him in that convention as a possible candidate for President in 1860. But the name had no conjuring power and fell upon unheeding ears, which heard it for the first time. Yet we now know that Mr. Lincoln was even then a well known and acknowledged leader of his party in his own state. But Illinois, fifty years ago, was far less familiar to Eastern

people and even to those of Ohio, than the new and distant state of Washington is to-day.

The speaker, observing with evident surprise that the name of Lincoln elicited no response from the Convention, said in prophetic words:

“You do not seem to know who Abraham Lincoln is, but we in Illinois know him, and the day is coming when you and the whole country will know him.”

Later in the Convention, however, Mr. Lincoln received one hundred and ten votes for Vice-President. Fortunately, perhaps, he was not nominated.

With characteristic zeal and courage Mr. Lincoln early championed the cause of freedom, and careless of the obloquy which that position invoked in the community and the state in which he lived, he put all thought of *immediate* promotion behind him and boldly challenged the right of the slaveholder to invade the territories with his peculiar institution, saying that he would rather fail on that platform than succeed on any other. He was a splendid example of a politician of absolute intellectual honesty, indulging in no ambiguous terms, making no mental reservations, but

daring to think freely and to speak and act openly. In his campaigns he scattered pearls of prophecy before the swinish herd which would have turned and rent him had he been less able and determined. He told them that this nation could not exist half slave and half free, but, Cassandra like, his prophecies were always discredited and ridiculed until they became history, when his wisdom was acknowledged.

He battled manfully for the election of Fremont in 1856, but not with hope of success, for no man knew better than he the resources of the opposition and the tremendous power of a hostile public sentiment. But he fought for the future, confident that the new party must win sooner or later because its cause was just, and he became the recognized leader of his party in Illinois on its organization and was its idol while he lived.

The events following the election of Mr. Buchanan; his pitiful, criminal weakness; the growing arrogance of the slave power; the overt and monstrous treason of Buchanan's cabinet officers; the rapid increase of the new party; the growing unrest of the South; the threats

of secession; the exceptional bitterness of the campaign of 1860; the nomination and election of Mr. Lincoln; the secession of seven states before his inauguration and before he had an opportunity officially to define his attitude toward the South are matters of familiar history with which it is not my purpose to deal, and I come to mention the first time I saw Mr. Lincoln.

It was in February, 1861, while he was on his way to Washington to his inauguration. I was chief clerk of the Ohio House of Representatives, and Mr. Lincoln was received by both houses of the General Assembly in joint session in the hall of the house. The Legislature of that year was a memorable body, not only because of the important questions it had to deal with, and did deal with wisely and promptly, but because it contained many men who had a large part in making the history of the next two decades. (Among its members were one who became President, one who became Governor, one who became a Justice of the United States Supreme Court, two who became cabinet officers, eighteen who during the war became general officers, or colonels, and a number of officers of lesser grade,

one who was elected United States Senator, and fourteen who became members of Congress.)

Mr. Lincoln came directly from the train to the hall of the house, passed up the center aisle and stood facing the Speaker's desk, within three feet of where I stood, while the presiding officer made the address of welcome. He was so tall that, standing on the floor, as he did, his eyes seemed on a level with mine as I stood on the raised platform of the clerk's desk.

He was a singular looking personage. His appearance at first glance was decidedly unprepossessing. Personal peculiarities are generally forgotten on a more intimate acquaintance, provided that acquaintance be favorable, but at first sight they largely control our estimate of men. Mr. Lincoln was being judged by outward appearance only, which is often a very poor standard. It certainly was in this case to an unusual degree.

Tall, brawny and angular in frame, with prominent, rugged and unintellectual features, gaunt cheeks rendered more marked by his evident fatigue of travel, in a suit of ill fitting clothes, he looked anything but a statesman or a President. His response to the address

of welcome was commonplace and was a disappointment to his friends, a subject of ridicule to his opponents. His voice was quaint and high pitched, though not unpleasant, and he seemed studiously to avoid saying anything that could by any possibility be misconstrued. On the whole, the impression he made was unfavorable. Democrats derided him while Republicans were silent or apologized for him in a half-hearted way.

In the evening of the day of his public reception by the General Assembly, the late Governor Dennison, to whose election, in 1859, Mr. Lincoln had contributed by two memorable speeches, one at Cincinnati, and one at Columbus, gave a reception to Mr. Lincoln at his residence, which was largely attended.

There he appeared to much better advantage and made an excellent impression. The travel stains were removed and a rest had evidently refreshed him. There was a singular charm in his manner, despite his ungainly person, which was a real attraction. His voice was peculiar, his speech quaint and homely, and his manner and bearing, though awkward according to the

tenets of fashion, was unaffected, easy and natural. The center of observation in a crowd of keen-eyed strangers, he was totally unembarrassed, and had a pleasant word for all. What he said, and the way he said it, conveyed an unexpected charm which was as pleasant as unexpected. He had the rare faculty of hiding his secret under a pleasant jest, and of illustrating his arguments with an amusing anecdote, and this faculty came into play on many occasions during his trip to Washington, when the public was as anxious to learn his policy as he was to conceal it. All that was unpleasant in the public reception was quite forgotten in his bearing at this social function, and all went away delighted with his good humor, his jocular talk and the facility with which he caught the temper of every group with which he conversed. It is not too much to say that all were delighted with the distinguished guest.

Mr. Lincoln proceeded to Washington and received his oath of office from the venerable Chief Justice Taney whose decision in the Dred Scott case had done so much to intensify the anti-slavery sentiment of the

North, and to hasten the opening of the temple of Janus. It was the old civilization passing its torch to the new.

From the moment of Lincoln's election the struggle which followed was inevitable, and the sooner it came the more easily it was to be met, and the more nobly concluded. True liberty is always aggressive or persecuted, but the attack is generally made on it by the power that is to be crushed.

Fort Sumter was fired upon in April, 1861, and the country was aroused from its long dream of peace. Then, as in our recent war with Spain, it seemed to be with the nation as it sometimes is with the household on being suddenly aroused from a peaceful slumber: Some of the members are apt to be dazed and to do some very foolish things before they are wide awake. Sooner or later, however, all who have any wits manage to resume the use of them and the family and the nation move along once more on right lines.

At one of the most critical periods in our Civil War, when the hearts of the bravest stood still with dread of the issue, Mr. Lincoln reminded the Nation that "the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy

present. That the occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our cause is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenfranchise ourselves and then we shall save our country."

The war came on and I entered the army the day of the firing on Sumter. After a service of two or three months with Rosecrans and McClellan in West Virginia, I was promoted and ordered to the army of the Potomac, which I joined on the day of the first battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861.

Stationed in and near the city of Washington, while *official* duties never took me to the White House, I saw much of Mr. Lincoln during the next six months, for his was a familiar figure at receptions, on the streets of the city, in the grounds around the White House, in the hospitals, and in the neighboring camps. In all the hurly burly of a great war of which he was the central figure and guiding spirit he was yet the same gentle, genial, modest, patient, humble American citizen he had ever been.

There was a noble dignity about the man, without any assumed superiority which so often marks the over-

elevation of a small soul. He rose, not above his place, but to it, and his deportment never brought discredit on the nation whose head he was.

Early in his official life he became well known for his frequent little acts of helpful ministry to the poor and distressed, and these continued until the end. I was witness to several such, but let reference to one suffice.

One day, with several other officers, I was in the office of the Paymaster General, Colonel Larned, when the President came in escorting an old lady, who from her garb and general appearance must have been very poor, and of the humblest class.

“Colonel,” said he to the Paymaster General, “this is Mrs. Jones, who has retained me to look after a claim she has for the back pay of her soldier boy, and I have come over to see about it.”

“Well, Mr. President,” said Colonel Larned, “be seated, and I will send a clerk to look the matter up, and relieve you from further trouble.”

“Oh, no, that won’t do,” said Mr. Lincoln pleasantly,

“I must see to this myself, as she is my client for the time being.”

So the President was sent to another room with a clerk, the old lady going with them.

We waited their return to see the outcome of the matter. In a little while they returned, when on an inquiry from Colonel Larned, Mr. Lincoln said:

“Yes, Colonel, that is all right, and she will get her money tomorrow, but,” dropping his voice and holding his hand to the side of his mouth, he continued jocosely, “How am I to get shut of the old lady?”

“That, Mr. President, is not in the line of my duty, and I fear I cannot assist you,” was the response.

“Well, well,” said the President, “then I’ll have to manage it somehow.”

He then turned to the group of officers standing near, and, after greeting each one pleasantly, he said to the old lady: “Come along, Aunty, let’s go over home,” and he escorted her from the room, down the stairway and across to the White House with all the courtesy due to the most distinguished lady, chatting familiarly with her by the way.

He was one of the most approachable men I ever met in so high position. On one occasion, soon after I joined the Army of the Potomac, my friend, Major Fayette Brown, of Cleveland, and myself were passing through the grounds of the White House when we saw Mr. Lincoln standing in the north portico. Major Brown, by the way, was six feet three inches in height. He suggested that we go up and speak to the President, which we did, introducing one another. The President's cordial greeting put us at our ease at once, and he talked freely and pleasantly, asking about some of the commands across the river. In the course of the conversation Major Brown said: "Mr. President, what is your height?"

"When I let myself out, this way," said he, straightening himself up, "I am six feet four inches. And how tall are you, Major?"

"I am six feet three inches, Mr. President, and I assure you it is a great pleasure to have seen *one* President that I can look up to."

The prompt and witty response greatly amused Mr. Lincoln, who laughed heartily, and it was the cause of

securing us quite frequent recognition by him afterwards, and he often repeated the incident.

Colonel E. D. Baker, who had been an officer in the Mexican War, and who was then a Senator in Congress from Oregon, though a citizen of California, and the commander of a regiment of volunteers in the Army of the Potomac, was one of Mr. Lincoln's most intimate friends of long standing, having been his associate at the bar and on the stump in Illinois for many years. He was a handsome man, of sturdy, vigorous frame and fine presence, an orator of note and one of the most genial and popular men of his day—the very Hampden of our Civil War. He is always intimately associated in my memory with Mr. Lincoln, not only because of their close friendship, and because I had often seen them together, but because I saw them together the last time they met in this life. It was on the lawn to the northeast of the White House one beautiful October afternoon in 1861. Mr. Lincoln sat on the ground leaning against a tree; Colonel Baker was lying prone on the ground his head supported by his clasped hands. The trees and the lawns were gorgeous in

purple and crimson and scarlet, like the curtains of God's tabernacle, fitting background for such a picture. Near by was Mr. Lincoln's son Willie who died in the following February. The child was tossing the fallen leaves about in childish grace and abandon. I was passing through the grounds with a friend, when, seeing the group, we paused, out of ear shot, of course, to study the picture which is vividly photographed in my memory. Their conversation was low voiced, earnest and serious. No indication of merriment was visible, which was noticeable, because so different from ordinary conversations in which either of them took part. The pranks of the child were in singular contrast with the subdued and serious demeanor of the men. While we stood there, Colonel Baker arose, took the President's hand and bade him adieu, lifted the child and kissed it, and went to his horse which was held by an orderly on the avenue near by, mounted and rode away. The President's gaze followed the retiring officer until he disappeared to the West, when he took the child by the hand, and slowly and sadly returned to the house.

You may naturally inquire what there was in so commonplace a tableau, even of such distinguished men to so fix it in the memory. It was the fact that on the following day Colonel Baker was killed at the unfortunate battle of Ball's Bluff, and I have always imagined that their conversation was of that battle and its possible issue.

The death of Colonel Baker was a great shock to Mr. Lincoln, as it was, in fact, to the whole country, and one from which he was long in recovering, but the enormous bloodshed, suffering and disaster of the succeeding twelvemonth took away all sense of personal loss and private grief from one who constantly bore the nation's griefs and burdens.

While I was in the Army of the Potomac in 1861, I was nominated and elected Secretary of State of Ohio, on the Union Ticket with Governor Tod. Our ticket that year received the unprecedented majority of 55,000. Mr. Lincoln's majority the previous year had been but 21,000. I had gone to the War Department late in the evening of election day to hear what news had been received of the Ohio election and to

give the news I had received. While I was there, Mr. Lincoln came in. He had heard the news from Ohio and was in great good humor. He seemed to keep his eye and thought on every battlefield, whether the weapons used were bullets or ballots, well knowing that the results of either contest was of vital moment to the great struggle which was in progress. I never saw him in such excellent spirits before, or after. This was the first important election that had been held since the war began, or since his own election, and he had looked to its results with great interest as indicating the temper of the people toward his administration.

He had much to say of Ohio, her soldiers, her Governor (Dennison) and her steadfast loyalty. This was before Grant and Sherman and Sheridan and hundreds of others of our gallant men had won distinction.

Two years later—October, '63—when Lincoln received the word that John Brough had defeated Vallandigham by 100,000 majority, he sent his memorable dispatch: "Glory to God in the highest! Ohio has saved the nation."

While I was in charge of Ohio military affairs at Columbus, as Adjutant General of the State, from January, 1864, until the close of the war, I had, necessarily, more frequent intercourse with the President when visiting Washington, and better opportunity to observe what manner of man he was.

By that time, however, people had come to know him better and to appreciate him more accurately. I had not seen him from the latter part of October, 1861, when I left the Army of the Potomac for the West, until June, 1864, when Ohio military affairs called me to Washington. What first struck me in Mr. Lincoln's appearance as differing from what it had been in 1861 was that he had aged perceptibly and far more than two and a half years would ordinarily produce. The lines in his face, marked by fifty years of patient endurance, were deepened by the myriad of decisions he had been forced to make in the last three years. But, though he had for three years filled a throne great as that of any king or kaiser, with an ease, a grace and a dignity which became him as if born in the purple, yet his plain, homely manner

was unchanged by the social and intellectual attrition of his high office.

My first call upon the President in 1864 was after his second nomination and soon after an important aid had been rendered the government in the voluntary offer and prompt forwarding of a large contingent of Ohio troops in May, 1864, to which he referred with considerable enthusiasm and kindly said that I had contributed substantially to that work. Altogether his reception was most cordial and gratifying.

But in my interview then and every time I saw him afterwards, I was saddened with the thought that his load was almost too heavy for his strength, and, stalwart and vigorous of frame though he was, that he was liable to sink under it at any moment. Yet he was genial as ever, despite that undertone of melancholy which never entirely forsook him. Trained and disciplined in the school of privation, and developed by a life of severest toil, a continuance of sorrow and trial may have been necessary to bring out what was best in his nature.

He talked of the pending political campaign with

great intelligence and interest, and had many pertinent inquiries to make as to the political situation in Ohio.

His anxiety as to the result of the election, however, seemed less on his own account than because of the effect his defeat might have on the issue of the war.

There were some peculiar circumstances connected with the political campaign of that year not generally considered by historians of that time, and I allude to them here because I had served with McClellan in West Virginia and in the Army of the Potomac and with Fremont in the Shenandoah Valley and had very decided opinions as to the military qualifications of both.

The fact that both McClellan and Fremont were candidates against Mr. Lincoln on platforms declaring the war a failure was well calculated to wound his sensibilities most keenly, though I never heard that he referred to either of the candidates in a bitter spirit.

Fremont, who had been the Republican candidate in 1856 and for whose election Mr. Lincoln had rendered yeoman service, and for whose high rank in the

army he was indebted to Mr. Lincoln, had allowed himself to be made the candidate of a handful of Republican malcontents at the Cleveland Convention. He had said many bitter things about Mr. Lincoln. In his letter of acceptance he said:

“I consider that his (Lincoln’s) administration has been politically, militarily and financially a failure, and that its necessary continuance is a cause of regret to the country.”

The animus of Fremont’s attitude, however, was not hard to find. Mr. Lincoln was unwilling to take him, as a military man, at his own estimate, and that was a capital offense in Fremont’s code.

Talking of the Fremont movement one day to Governor Brough and myself, Mr. Lincoln told the story of two newly-arrived Irishmen who were puzzled over the noise of a tree frog and sought in vain to locate its source, when one of them finally said to the other: “Come off wid ye, Pat; sure, an’ it’s nothing but a noise.” A good many things in this world at which timid people become greatly alarmed are found on nearer approach to be mere noise.

General McClellan, for whom Mr. Lincoln had risked much and estranged many friends, in retaining him at the head of the army long after the country had repudiated him, was the candidate of the Democratic party on a platform the chief plank in which was the declaration that the war had been a failure; to which alleged failure, by the way, the candidate had been chief contributor. Thus two men for whom he had done much and suffered much and who with every opportunity and unlimited resources had signally failed, were arrayed against him.

To have been defeated at all would have been bad enough, but defeat by McClellan would have been in the nature of a personal injury. The Fremont party "petered out," as Mr. Lincoln expressed it, long before the election, the candidate being about the last member of the aggregation to disappear, but the opposition led by the repudiated commander kept up their attack to the last moment, when in the final assault the leader fell outside the breastworks, thus adding one more to his unbroken succession of defeats. Thus did the American people confirm in unmistak-

able terms the well-established principle that no man may take advantage of his own wrong.

The campaign of that year was one of unexampled bitterness and Mr. Lincoln's exultation over his reelection was undisguised, but it was also unselfish. The man who could forgive a personal insult was great enough to put self aside and to regard the success as a victory of the Union forces and a declaration of the determination of the people to stand by free government and the rights of humanity.

When the secret history of that campaign, on which hung the life of this nation, comes to be written in all its details and ramifications, as I hope it never will be written, it will reveal a conspiracy of such widespread and alarming proportions and such depths of deceit, infamy and cruelty as will rouse the indignation of every true patriot; and Mr. Lincoln was the focal point of the whole damnable scheme, and his downfall and disgrace its sole object.

But, thanks to that Providence which has never deserted any cause which makes for righteousness, Farragut at Mobile Bay, and Sherman at Atlanta

changed the entire aspect of things; conspiracy hid itself, frightened by the shouts of victory, and the Union was saved long before the final scene in the great tragedy at Appomattox.

Mr. Lincoln had a rich fund of humor, and during his term of office he was best known to the world at large for his droll stories and humorous but forcible illustrations. But the underlying melancholy which had always attended him was intensified by the tragic events of the war, and was to me most pathetic.

I had known Mr. Stanton, Secretary of War, from my early boyhood, and, when in Washington, was frequently in his office at the War Department, where my friend, the late General Anson Stager was chief telegrapher. I was there one evening during the awful battle summer of 1864, quite late and had been shown some dispatches from the front which were anything but pleasant. Near midnight we heard a heavy, measured step ascending the stairs and coming through the hall toward the open door of the office.

“Stager,” said Stanton in his quick, nervous way, “here comes the President; hide those dispatches

and cook up something not quite so gloomy, or he will not sleep tonight.”

Mr. Lincoln had come over from the White House entirely alone at that late hour to find comfort from his untiring war minister. Under the encouragement of a doctored telegram he became quite genial, and after a little pleasant conversation he returned home. “That,” said Mr. Stanton, to me, when Mr. Lincoln retired, “is almost a nightly occurrence.”

The next time I saw Mr. Lincoln was in April, 1865, and he was in his coffin.

The day of his assassination—Good Friday, day of evil omen—had been a gala day all over the country in honor of the fall of Richmond and the surrender of Lee. The day was an ideal one for such rejoicings. The display was very elaborate, and joy was unconfined. The war was over and the Union saved. Why should not the people rejoice? At Columbus, where I was then stationed, the evening was brilliant with illumination and bonfires; jubilant crowds paraded the streets, and the city sank to sleep at a late hour, happy in the thought of the new era of peace which

had dawned. There was no premonition of the dark cloud which had even then settled down on our cause in the East, or of the night of horrors through which the people of Washington were passing.

The next morning was gloomy and wet, but I was early at my office. The gay trappings of the day before hung limp and faded as if in mockery of yesterday's rejoicings. I had been at my desk but a few moments when some one came in with the information that Lincoln, Seward, Stanton and Grant had been assassinated; that Lincoln was dead and the others would die.

For the first time in the past four busy and eventful years I lost hope and broke down utterly. What did this forebode? Was yesterday a dream? Had chaos come again?

I was recalled from my collapse somewhat rudely by the information that Rev. Col. Granville Moody was making an incendiary speech to an excited crowd at the corner of State and High Streets, and preaching bloody reprisals. I sent our private policeman, Capt. Bernard McCabe, to request him to stop, and the

Colonel sent an impertinent reply. I then directed his arrest and that he be brought to my office, which was done, and none too soon, for he was a celebrated hot gospeller and rabble rouser and had wrought the crowd to so high a pitch of excitement that they were about ready to use the torch and the rope. The most intense excitement everywhere prevailed, and any sign of exultation at the cruel taking off of the nation's idol would have met with summary punishment, so that I had enough to do to keep me from brooding over the terrible disaster.

I allude to Mr. Lincoln's death in order to mention his funeral obsequies of which, by virtue of my office, I had general charge from the Pennsylvania line to the Indiana line; that is, while the remains of the President were in the state of Ohio. Elaborate preparations were made at Cleveland and Columbus for the reception of the funeral escort, and to enable the people to view the remains. At Cleveland the body lay in state on a catafalque erected for the purpose in the public square near where the Perry monument then

stood. At Columbus they were exposed upon the catafalque in the rotunda of the Capitol.

Our party left Cleveland for the East in the early morning and met the funeral train at the Eastern State line about sunrise. The train was black robed throughout, and the funeral car contained the remains of Mr. Lincoln and those of his son Willie who died two years before. The train was drawn by the engine "Union," the same which had drawn the train which carried Mr. Lincoln to Washington four years before. As we sped along westward in the early spring morning tearful groups of men, women and children were gathered by the roadside, some clad in mourning, some holding flags draped in black. Flags were at half mast in all the villages and in farmyards, and the people were massed at the stations. At Cleveland and Columbus immense crowds thronged the streets and passed to view the remains. At Columbus, the State House was elaborately draped and along the west facade were displayed those memorable words from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address which had

been the keynote of his whole official life: "With malice toward none, with charity for all."

The beautiful rotunda of the State House was transformed into a gorgeous tomb, but we had studiously avoided any effort at mere display. Everything was simple and beautiful in arrangement as became the character of him for whom it was a memorial.

Never in our previous history had such crowds assembled, yet there was a solemn hush over all indicative of the strong hold this plain westerling had upon the hearts of the people. Each one had lost a friend and all spoke with a sense of personal grief. Not less than fifty thousand persons viewed the remains at Columbus, and probably as many more did so at Cleveland.

The closing scene at Columbus was of such impressive solemnity that I hesitate to attempt a description.

The westerly sun seemed to shed a peculiar glory and bathed the city in golden radiance. The mourning crowds had departed and none remained in or about the Capitol save the few who had there a duty to perform. A group of ladies, chosen for that purpose,

entered the rotunda and sat for a short time beside the catafalque in tearful silence. The guard of honor, which never left the remains, kept up their faithful vigil, walking with solemn tread about the platform. A halo of the golden sunlight filtered through the summit of the dome, and hung above the silent group beneath like a benediction. The evening shadows were gathering in the corridors and creeping stealthily up the stairways, when in an oppressive silence, Governor Brough and myself with a few others entered the rotunda through the eastern arch, and, with the guard of honor and the attending ladies, followed the remains from the Capitol to the grounds without. As the silent procession emerged through the western door of the State House a band played "Old Hundred," a national salute was fired, the remains were conveyed to the funeral car, and, as the sun sank from sight in the west the train passed from the city.

The route from Columbus to Richmond, Indiana, was traversed in the night, but that did not prevent the tributes of honor. Bonfires and torch-lights were continuous, and symbols of mourning were every-

where displayed. At Urbana three thousand persons were at the station. The train was stopped for a few minutes and ten young ladies entered the car and strewed flowers on the martyr's coffin. One of the ladies was so affected that she wept aloud in great anguish.

On the outside a platform had been erected on which was a choir of forty voices, men and women, representing all the city churches, who sang with touching melody, "Go to thy rest."

At Piqua, which was reached at midnight, ten thousand were assembled. Here lamps, torches and bonfires lit up the night. The depot was elaborately illuminated, bands from Troy and Piqua played appropriate music, and a large choir from the churches of the city led by Rev. Granville Moody, sang a funeral hymn, which was followed by a choir of thirty-six ladies in white costumes and black sashes, who sang a plaintive melody which touched the hearts of all who heard it.

At Richmond, Indiana, which was reached at three o'clock on Sunday, not less than ten thousand people

assembled. There our party left the train, and it sped on its way to Indianapolis and Chicago, and to his final restingplace in the home he loved so well.

The mortal part of Abraham Lincoln rests in an honored tomb which will be long remembered, but the memory of his high statesmanship, wise above comparison and as openly faithful as any in this age has witnessed, will live in Anglo-Saxon hearts, not only as the best example of what our race can attain, but as an encouragement to the lowest and most obscure that the highest and the best is attainable.

No American since Washington is so enshrined in the hearts of the people as is Mr. Lincoln. And it grows out of no mere sentimental or official respect. They know in whom they believed, and their affection is genuine and will be lasting.

Yet, great as is that affection he merited it all by his manly character, his masterful conduct of affairs, the tenor of his life, which was pure and noble, his integrity which was thorough and incorruptible. His mind and heart were broad and generous as the vast

prairies of his Western home, true and sturdy as its oaks and gentle as its flowers.

Environed in his high office by cant and affectation, he was simple, unaffected, true.

Thwarted and embarrassed by blunderers he seldom made a mistake.

He was firm in character, comprehensive in act, and wise in a policy so rarely tempered that it could at once conciliate and command.

One of the mildest and most peace-loving of men, yet it was his to be the leader of the most extensive and desolating civil war in history.

It is interesting in this connection to notice that one of the leading delegates in the Parliament of Peace at the Hague, stated before that Parliament that it was the action of Mr. Lincoln in drawing up a code of rules of war for the Union armies which prompted Alexander II, the then Czar of Russia to propose the Brussels conference at the Hague, of which the recent conference was but the sequel. So that Mr. Lincoln's action was the initial effort to make war, which Napoleon called the science of barbarians,

more humane, and to elevate it above a mere death struggle of wild beasts.

In all the many and diverse qualities that go to make up character, Lincoln was a thoroughly genuine man. His sense of justice was perfect, ever present and all controlling. His integrity was second to none; his ambition was stainless, and from his mental crucible came no dross or slag, but only the pure gold of principle.

In the midst of doubt he was clear.

Sincere and straightforward, he was never ill-timed or blunt.

He never sought to create public sentiment; he embodied it, for he walked hand in hand with the common people who loved him and trusted him as he did them, for he was one of them.

He was a statesman in that he was able to discover the trend of events and to shape the course of national affairs in harmony therewith. He knew his country and his time, for he held his finger on the Nation's pulse and he both heard and saw.

Such men as Mr. Lincoln represent the conscience

of a people, inchoate it may be for a time, but when that conscience is developed and perfected, in proportion as they are held in honor is a people fully cognizant of their representative character and all that it implies.

He destroyed human slavery under the stars and stripes, an object for which men who seemed far better equipped—so different are God's ways from ours—had long sought in vain.

That historical state paper which spoke freedom to a race closed with these impressive words which sound like the deliverance of an inspired prophet of the old Theocracy:

“Upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

The “gracious favor of Almighty God” came promptly, because, on January 1, 1863, when that proclamation was made, though the road was yet long and bloody and thickly strewn with dead men, yet Appomattox lay at the end and was even then in sight.

Slavery was vital to the Southern cause, and Mr. Lincoln struck the Confederacy in its most vital part. He formulated the great principle of Emancipation as a political doctrine, and wrought it into our national fabric, where it will endure while the nation lives.

That emancipation was not a mere sentiment, but that he had the fact very near his heart is evidenced by his Fourth Annual Message, in December, 1864, in which he used this significant language: "I repeat the declaration made a year ago, that 'while I remain in my present position I shall not attempt to retract or modify the emancipation proclamation, nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation, or by any of the acts of Congress.' "If the people should, by whatever mode or means, make it an executive duty to re-enslave such persons *another and not I* must be their instrument to enforce it."

I have no doubt he had Emancipation in his mind and purpose the moment Sumter was fired upon, but no man knew so well as he did how to bide his time. He never spoke or acted too early or too late. He

was constantly importuned by enthusiasts to declare emancipation and was denounced because he would not. He was unmoved by clamor, adverse criticism or abuse, even though it threatened the rupture of valued friendships, and the loss of powerful influences on which he had come to rely in support of his policies.

To have proclaimed freedom to the slave at the beginning would have been fatal to our cause. To have proclaimed it after the battle of Bull Run, even, would have been disastrous.

It would no doubt have drawn away from us the border states of Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri where the secession element really predominated. Furthermore, that large element at the North which opposed emancipation, some on principle and some because they thought the time had not yet come, would in all probability have refused its support of the Union cause at a time when we were barely holding our own.

But above all was the fact, ever present in Mr. Lincoln's mind, as his speeches and papers abundantly attest, notably his letter to Mr. Greeley, that

the war was being waged primarily to restore the Union and to settle the right of secession. If slavery were made the primary issue, as it would have been by a too early proclamation of emancipation, no matter what the result of the war, the question of secession would have been unsettled, and might come up at some future time to give us trouble. By holding to his original purpose and making all other questions, no matter how vital, secondary, the contest once settled the question of the right of secession would be settled for all times.

The pressure which was brought to bear upon him to force him to declare freedom to the slaves in advance of his own judgment as to the proper time was tremendous, and would have compelled almost any one else to yield. This pressure all came from white men, politicians and others. Those who were most vitally interested—the negroes in slavery—were the least impatient. Their confidence in Mr. Lincoln was sublime in its degree, touching in its simplicity. One of them expressed the general feeling thus:

“Pretty soon we shall be free. We don’t know

just when, but the good Lord and Massa Lincoln know, and they will tell us in their own good time."

When asked if they were not impatient at the delay, an old saint in ebony, on a Virginia plantation, said to me, "Oh, no; of course Massa Lincoln knows best."

But Mr. Lincoln was led by circumstances and not by impulse. His unerring judgment selected the proper time to speak, and he erected that moral breastwork without which he dare not hope for "the gracious favor of Almighty God," but behind which our cause was safe, and to the dumb, dark millions who had waited so long, so patiently and so uncomplainingly, the hour came at last when the glad evangel of Freedom broke the long, sad silence of their night of wrong, and made victory possible.

Mr. Lincoln was a good man, a God-fearing man; honest, temperate, forgiving, long-suffering, self-sacrificing.

I care little what may have been his creed, for I know what his character was, and that is a far better standard than any mere formula of words can be. He believed in the Fatherhood of God and the Brother-

hood of man. His sermons were deeds of helpful ministry and his life exemplified his faith.

If it be true, as I believe it is, that character and service and a true sense of the law of stewardship are the only convincing evidences of the possession of a religious spirit, then was Mr. Lincoln a religious man in the true sense.

He never spoke unkindly of any one, not even of traitors in arms, or of assassins plotting against his life. To one who said to him, a few 'days before his death, speaking of Jefferson Davis: "Do not allow him to escape the laws; he must be hanged," Mr. Lincoln replied calmly, "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

He possessed in an unusual degree that rare nobility of soul that places a man above all petty, personal feeling, and which belongs not to rank and title but to integrity and worth.

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate his worth, his sagacity, his remarkable genius. His state papers abound in language of classic beauty and are instinct with rare common sense, with shrewd but profound

wisdom and lofty thought. They were great because the writer's great soul was in every utterance, and his soul was a temple to which great thoughts came to worship and his speech was a magic wand which swayed the hearts of men as the tempest sways the trees of the forest.

He was a man without vices of habit or speech. Few men in the annals of the race have been as thoroughly tested; tested by opposition, by slander, by ridicule; yet he bore no malice, remembered no abuse, showed no vindictiveness.

His last official act was in the afternoon of that fateful Friday when, learning that two of the prominent leaders of the Rebellion were to arrive in disguise at one of the principal ports hoping to escape to Europe, he instructed his officers not to arrest them, but to let them escape from the country. He did not thirst for their blood, though in a few hours, one of their associates took his life in the most cruel and dastardly manner.

At the very moment when his mind was busy maturing plans of reconstruction and his heart was yearning

for reconciliation and anxious to forgive, the treacherous blow fell. It only lacked the deep damnation of his taking-off to fill the cup of the iniquity of slavery to the full and to make that accursed institution the horror of our history.

In raising a flag above Independence Hall in Philadelphia in February, 1861, he said:

“It was something in the Declaration of Independence giving liberty, not only to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all coming time. It is that which gives promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men and that all should have an equal chance.

* * * * *

“Now, my friends, can this country be saved upon that basis? If it can, I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world if I can help to save it. But if this country can not be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say that I would rather be assassinated upon the spot than to surrender it. I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by and if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, to die by.”

To a delegation urging emancipation, he said: "When the time comes for dealing with slavery I trust I shall be willing to do my duty though it costs me my life. And, gentlemen, lives will be lost."

Did he then have the dark shadow of his cruel death hovering in his mind? If he had, he shrank not from the sacrifice but marched with calm and steady pace to meet it. The drama of history presents no scene more impressive in its tragedy than that which was enacted at Ford's Theater, Washington, on the night of April 15, 1865.

Although he fell a victim of the bullet of an assassin by as foul a murder as ever disfigured the annals of our civilization, I doubt if, in his entire career, checkered as it was and passed among a primitive people, and in the rude life of the frontier, he ever made a personal enemy.

He was stricken, not for anything in his own personality, but because he was the exponent of the great principle of national and personal freedom and the beloved representative of a loyal people.

Truly did he live "with malice toward none, with charity for all."

His life illustrates the important fact, too often lost sight of, that the reputation which endures is built by the man himself and not by censorious critics. But he lived long enough to receive the consolation of success though it came so late as to prove but a setting glory. Since his death, however, his former unfriendly critics have become his eulogists, his libellers have become his admirers and his enemies his worshippers. The world's verdict if slow is very apt to be just. Careless of monument over his grave, he builded it in the world; a monument by which we are taught to remember, not where he died, but where he lived.

History never embalmed a reputation more spotless, or more sacred, and it has already done justice to his name while it is yet fresh in living memories. As his homely figure recedes and rises into history, we shall see yet more clearly the grandeur and dignity of its proportions, and it is not too much to say that future generations will recognize in him the central figure of the nineteenth century in American history.

Looking at the character and the career of this man from the standpoint of this later day, when a generation has passed since his death and almost a century has passed since his birth, when time has clarified the vision and ripened the judgment, we are able to realize that no man in our history has gone so far as he in securing and holding the kind of fame compounded of admiration for commanding ability and service and love, for tenderness of heart, sweetness of nature and beauty of spirit.

Considering his circumstances and appearance, there is nothing more extraordinary than the growing appreciation of certain rare beauty in his character which, now that the misconception and passion of his day have passed, throw about his uncouth figure a soft radiance.

There was something in his unique personality which evoked a tenderness which has gone out to no other President. We not only revere the memory—we love the man.

His largeness of vision; so much broader than those with whom he worked, becomes more apparent

in the light of greater events, and can only be accounted for in his greatness of soul. The intervening years have distilled, as it were, from his great reputation, a finer, purer, higher fame.

We are jarred, sometimes disgusted, at the meanness to which public men stoop in the strife and jealousy of political life, which can only waste and baffle the strength and plans of real statesmanship. The magnanimity, patience, unselfishness and sanity of this man set him apart from the moral egotists, the harsh radicals and the complaisant politicians of his time.

I think the estimate of the country today may be briefly stated as being of a great, tender, human soul, by temperament and conditions, solitary perhaps, bearing a burden of sorrows, not his own, but of a whole people; called to rule a household, widely divided, though still a household, without hatred or any spirit of strife, but with a heart of compassion for those who opposed, as for those who would sustain.

As the years go by and the Blue and the Gray are equally honored, the prescience of this man grows more distinct. Like Moses, he died without the sight

of the promised land, yet we now know that he was the inspired prophet of a future, now a living present.

There were men of great ability about Lincoln in his trying hours—men of great patriotism as the world then looked upon such things, and their services can not be overlooked—but he stands out separate and apart from all by reason of a certain largeness they lacked, which we did not perceive at the time.

Now that the old feelings, animosities and passions are dead, those who opposed him, as well as those who sustained him, have joined in the acclaim, and hail him as the “First American.”

* * * * *

The final result of the deadly assault on the life of the Nation in 1861, so horrible in appearance at the outset, was a confirmation of our greatness; a trial of our strength; a punishment of our sham pretenses, and the establishment in our hands forever of the leadership in the political progress and freedom of the world.

Now, with a united country we join in a holy compact to stand as the exemplar and champion of justice and mercy the world around. And the crimson of the blood that has sealed this covenant imparts a richer hue to our banner of beauty and glory which has risen as a new aurora in the distant islands of the sea, a very evangel of liberty.

Who dare say, in the light of today, that a single soldier of that mighty host, from commander-in-chief to drummer boy, died in vain?

[THE END]





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